WESTWORDS

Archives
MSMC

Volume 10 — Number 1
January, 1967

Published quarterly
by the students of
Mount St. Mary's College,
Los Angeles, California

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WESTWORDS

"---Were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and
death,
But had thought they were different: this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like a Death, our death.

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Epiphany...

Epiphany . . .
the Word spirals,
seagull soaring, upward,
warm as bee-contrived candles,
August gathered grapes, plucked from yellow-green hands,
powdered earth-grey, tasting of forever
in the summered mouth;
upward into conscience, not to be spoken.

Epiphany . . .
the Word ripens,
drops, feeding earth seeming dead;
slumbers, a shadow beneath browning hands
folded over unwatered grey;
a stirring, breath recalling the heady odor
of waxen-purple crushed; hesitant, a prodding to speak
feeling before caught in the sunlit gull arc.

Epiphany . . .

FRANCES FISHER

The Hard Way to Wholeness

SUSAN HERNANDEZ

Dante's *Comedy* (Huse tr.) ranks among the masterpieces in literature of all ages. This medieval epic portrays man as his own hindrance to fulfillment on the journey of life. The *Comedy* deals with a paradox in the destiny of mankind – that every human being must die in order to live, that everyone must lose himself before he can find himself.

This death-resurrection theme echoes through Dante's work with many symbols: darkness before light, grief preceding joy, ugliness before beauty. But the whole of this message comes alive in the person of Dante himself as as he progresses through each world of the *Comedy*. At the outset of his journey the poet decides to go down in order to rise again without realizing the full meaning of this decision. Through his first companion, Virgil and his second guide Beatrice, whom he once loved on earth, Dante learns about free will and his capacity for truth and love. With this learning he grasps, little by little, the meaning of his initial decision to lay down his life. Throughout the Inferno the Purgatorio and the Paradiso, the poet's willingness to discover his identity by dying to self grows into decisiveness. It is this gradual growth in Dante's commitment as he travels through the stages of self-knowledge, understanding and actualization that eventually leads to his resurrection.

In the midstream of life, the poet "comes to his senses" and finds himself too weak and ignorant to climb the mountain life poses before him. Talking to Virgil, he realizes that, before climbing, he must first go down into the depths of despair, into the abyss of helplessness where the core of his being is rooted. Like any of us, Dante is still skeptical about the need for this difficult journey. He tries to avoid it with the excuse that he is not an outstanding person – "not a Paul nor an Aeneas." It is this false humility, however, that makes Dante's journey necessary. For, though he "rose above the common crowd" in his love for Beatrice, he is now "dulled with cowardice" (Inf. 2:46). At one time he had acted as an individual with initiative, but now he is filled with a fear that he disguises as humility.

Virgil urges him not to remain uncommitted any longer, rather to be "bold" and "free" by looking into himself for the obstacles to fulfillment. Dante finally makes up his mind to descend into the inferno of self-knowledge where one can easily despair. Virgil, however, prods him to "give up all distrust" (Inf. 3:14) by plunging into himself with the hope of rising again.

Entering the hell of self-knowledge, Dante immediately sees the emptiness of his former indecision. Virgil explains that a "miserable fate/afflicts the wretched souls ... who were neither rebellious/nor faithful to God, but to themselves" (Inf. 3:34-39). Dante realizes from personal experience that these souls "had never raelly lived" (Inf. 3:64) because they had committed their their will to nothing but their own smugness. For this reason, they have earned the greatest scorn of all – no recognition from anyone whatsoever. Now they run after banners like madmen, anxious to commit themselves to anything. Dante is "not to speak of them, but look and pass on" (Inf. 3:51).

Seeing his own sinfullness through these and other souls, Dante reaches a turning point in his process of self-knowledge. In front of a roaring waterfall, he loosens the cord around his waist. With it he had hoped, before entering

the Inferno, to overcome lust and luxury – "the leopard with the painted hide" that stood before the mountain. Now he must get rid of this cord of hypocritical penance and false humility. It had been his excuse for avoiding the journey into self-knowledge, for remaining uncommitted. When Virgil throws it into the water, Geryon, the monstrous personification of fraud, comes swimming up as proof of Dante's hypocrisy in wearing this cord. Seeing the falsehood of his former commitment, the poet goes on descending to uproot himself from the center of all deceit.

This point of complete negation is the bottom of hell where he is repelled by the sight of Satan freezing in hatred. Dante is stunned when he recognizes the core of evil in himself. Feeling the emptiness of his former rejection of commitment, he "did not die and did not stay alive/but became without life or death" (Inf. 34:25, 26). Virgil tells him that "here is the place where he must arm himself with courage" (Inf. 34:20-21), rather than "abandon every hope." The purpose of the poet's descent into the depths of his soul is not to die from despair, but to rise to victory over himself. Once Dante recognizes his utter helplessness, Virgil tells him: "Get up on your feet... The road is long and the path rough" (Inf. 34:94-95). As he leaves the Inferno, Dante sees the hell of himself upside down. Only by understanding this disorderly existence of his, only by accepting his shortcomings humbly, can Dante hope to attain self-fulfillment. His commitment to lay down his life in order to be lifted up now leads him to the stage of self-understanding.

Entering the Purgatorio, Virgil girds Dante with a "humble plant." After recognizing his own ugliness, Dante must commit himself to purification with true humility – the life-giving understanding of self, the plant whose fruit is self-fulfillment. Dante now catches sight of a soul whom he considers "more negligent/than if laziness were his sister" (Purg. 4:109-110.) Remembering his lack of commitment, the poet easily identifies this soul's fault as indolence and, with a smile, tries to spur him out of inaction. The shade represents Dante's former negligence. The poet, however, does not condemn this fault in himself, but understands it with a smile and goes on, staunchly pursuing his commitment.

Half-way through the Purgatorio, Dante experiences a crisis in his process of purification. He suddenly stops when his "strength melts away and the power of his legs is suspended" (Purg. 17:73-76). Seeing Dante's need for reassurance in his search for fulfillment, Virgil explains to him about the power of love. To make Dante re-evaluate his journey, he reminds the traveler of his free decision to take it. Virgil recalls to him "the power ... to resist" (Purg. 18:72) this whole process of finding life by losing it, He says that "Beatrice [whom they will presently meet] understands" this human power "as free will" (Purg. 18:73). "Here the slackened oars are plied again" (Purg. 17:87) for Dante, as he begins to realize that freedom and love are essential for his commitment to result in resurrection.

At the end of the Purgatorio, Virgil leaves the poet with Beatrice, Dante's former love who will guide him through the rest of his journey. She rebukes him severely for his previous lack of commitment, saying that

> this man was such, potentially, in his young life
> that every good disposition
> might have come to marvelous fruition ...
> [but] he abandoned [her] and gave himself to others
> (Purg. 31:115-117, 126).

As in the beginning of his journey, Dante is reminded that his devotion for

Beatrice had made him a man of decision – an individual not ruled by the crowd. Now she demands an answer for his falling away. Overcome with sorrow and unable to meet her challenge, he can only admit his guilt and assert his commitment with an inaudible "yes." Presently Dante falls asleep but immediately hears a cry from Beatrice:

> Arise! What are you doing? ...
> From fear and shame
> I want you now to free yourself
> So that you will not talk like one who dreams
> (Purg. 32:73; 33:31-33).

In the Purgatorio Dante has understood the ugliness he had seen in the depths of his soul. Now he is "born again ... renewed ... pure and prepared to mount" (Purg. 33:143-145) to the stage of actualization.

Entering the Paradiso, Dante meets two glorified souls whose relatives had kept them from living their religious vows. When the poet questions how they can be happy here of the lowest level of heaven without any desire for a "higher place," they say:

> a charity quiets our will
> and makes us wish only for what we have,
> and we thirst for nothing else ...
> His will is our peace
> (Parad. 3:70-72).

This is Dante's first glimpse of the fulfillment that complete self-surrender and total identification with God brings. But his conversation with "the inconstant nuns" leaves him torn with questions. "Like a lamb between two fierce wolves or a dog between two does" (Parad. 4:4-5), he cannot make up his mind on the meaning of free will until Beatrice thoroughly explains it to him. Rather than regressing into his original indecision, Dante is searching more deeply into the mystery of the personal commitment he has undertaken.

In the middle of the Paradiso, Dante's notion of love and free will is coming to crystallization. The poet speaks of "a gracious will in which ... love breathes righteously" (Parad. 15:1-2). He goes on to justify the unending suffering of the man "who through desire for things that do not last/deprives himself eternally of ... love" (Parad. 15:10-12). Dante sees the strong bond between love and free will and realizes that temporal attachments – unlike his commitment – leave a person unfulfilled. To reinforce this newly attained conviction, his great-great-grandfather appears to him. This soul condemns the social and spiritual welfare of their city-state. Foreseeing Dante's future, he distinguishes between prophecy and predestination. This conversation deals with ideas about personal commitment and free will that Dante has been wrestling with. As a result, he now re-evaluates his decision to attain fulfillment by losing himself:

> [In my journey] I have learned things which
> will have for many a bitter taste.
> And if I am a timid friend of Truth
> I fear to lose life among those
> who will call this time "ancient"
> (Parad. 17:16-20).

The poet has finally agreed to take the greatest risks to self-fulfillment – suffering and even the actual loss of his life. Armed with hope and humility through hell and purgatory, Dante realizes he "must arm" himself "with foresight" (Parad. 17:109) in his process of actualization in the Paradiso. Anticipation of possible suffering and death will prepare him to meet these without fear. His gradual realization of the power of truth, love and free will has ulti-

mately led him to total death of self. Following through on his commitment to lose his life, Dante proceeds to confront God in Whom he will rediscover his identity.

The poet sees God as the point of positive being, the center of all that is "yes" on which the whole universe depends. Here Dante knows "love of the good, replete with joy. . .that transcends all sweetness." Dead to self, he feels his being "surmounting his own power" (Parad. 30:56-57), longing to possess and be possessed by God. Dante says that his vision "through a chance" in him "was transformed" (Parad. 33:14). By dying to himself can he now see God in all the splendor of His trinity. He has finally attained self-fulfillment for now he

> can never consent to turn [from God because]
> the good which is the object of the will
> is all in [Him]
>
> (Parad. 33:101-104).

Dante is satiated with goodness itself. His journey ends once his "desire and will (in harmony)" start "turning like a wheel moved evenly by. . .Love" (Parad. 33:143-145).

With his free will he has carried out his initial decision to lay down his life and God has lifted him up. Alive in God, he becomes like God. Like the circle symbolizing God, the wheel, representing Dante's will and desire in perfect harmony, turns by the power of love. Only the gradual growth of Dante's commitment to lose his life could have led to this victorious resurrection.

Resurrection

Spin, spin around me life, assault the wall
I layered brick by brick as child and youth
in fits and spelling bees, through mamadoll –
just-mine, chilled ice cream quarrels and A's. Old truth
new seen, now worms into my fort where black
and sponge-damp earth packs hard my shroud, tightwound.
File fast the stone; I fumble for a crack
of light, but only mirrors circle round.
Have hope; life fashions rain to fall and seep
from world to world and weave like tentacles
between the cracks. Then clay turns mud, churns deep
to loose the cloth. Remove eyes' crusted hulls
to cross from bone-built latticework and grow
like seed in spring toward, perhaps, a window.

CHRISTA MAINZER

About Fire

About fire
there is a contradiction
and a spell.
It weaves
a puzzled-knot
and draws us close believing
warm, ignoring
fear of hot.
It seizes
on our eyes
with hypnotic color motion
misleading and deceiving
we stare drunken
from its potion.

LINDA WILLIAMS

The Razor

EILEEN GIBBS

The day was hot. The yellow window shade flapped occasionally, moving the sheer curtains with it. Time did not hang heavy for the girl on the bed. Thickened lids covered her eyes. Her arms, stretched out beside her curved slightly upward, revealing the bruises and the bandages. She was thinking very slowly and trying to remember it all. Her eyes slid half-way open, and tried to focus on her arm. The thin blue line was visible there where the bandage had pulled back, stretched like a cuff without a sweater. The line was crossed at neat intervals with short black lines, and an occasional knot showed against the fair skin.

In the other room she could hear his voice, low and pausing for long intervals. "On the phone again," she thought. In a while he'd be back, wanting to know again if she wanted to go, for sure. She had already told him twice. But she would say yes, again. And then he would take her.

Again the shade flapped, and outside she could see that the sun had moved since she had last looked. Then he came into the room, and softly told her that he had to leave her for a while, but that Angela would come in to her. Her eyes closed.

The next time that she opened her eyes, the friend had come and he had gone. Suddenly she wanted to talk very much. She almost laughed at herself when she heard the slowness of her speech, in comparison with the swiftness of the words within her, and their eagerness to come out.

"You can't imagine what it was like." The sound of her own words was startling after her long silence. "One thing I know. I won't try that again. It was to have been so easy, so smooth. But the recovery was terrible. All I can remember is kicking my feet. And they wouldn't loosen me. I said 'For God's sake loosen it three inches. Let me lie on my side. How can I hurt myself like that?' 'Be a good girl now,' they said."

"Yes, I know about hospitals. Usually when you want to do something the answer is 'No.'"

"And do you know? They had no ice water. Not for anyone. Now there's a campaign for you and me. Get ice water."

"Do you want some now?"

"Yes. No. I want lemonade."

"All right. Now what are you doing?"

"I'm trying to call him. He should be back by now. I want to know where he is. But I can't seem to dial."

Then Angela took the phone away, smoothed the sheets, and left for the lemonade.

Her eyes closed slowly, forcing her back into her own thoughts. At last her day off had come. After the wearying work days of pouring over the books, looking for the missing credit or the extra debit, she would have liked to have gone somewhere with him. But as usual he was gone. She wondered as she mechanically took out the shorts and halter from her drawer, if he would ever make enough sales on these trips so that ends would meet. Then she could leave that job for good. But, the sun was rising and she longed to be out in the

yard, sunning. Out there it would be hot, and the neighbors would be out working in their yards, or standing in knots, talking. Perhaps their words would float across to her, and their laughter. She would pretend not to see the sidelong glances.

Time spun away to another long weekend at home for her. The telephone had rung; her friend Angela. What a strange way to begin a conversation.....

"Have you had a falling out with Bonnie?"

"No, Angie, I talked to her just yesterday when I was out doing the yard work. She seemed very interested in my new two-piece bathing suit. Why do you ask?"

"Well, if there is no trouble, I don't want to start any. My only concern is for you."

Laughing she replied, "Well, Angie, you sound as if the trouble were some evil brooding over us."

"Let's change the subject. I'm really sorry that I brought it up."

"No. Now I won't let you drop it. You'll feel better if you tell me. What did you hear? Come now!"

"Really, to say that you are always half-dressed when your husband is gone is almost at the point of slander! I just wanted you to know what kind of people you are up against over there."

It had sounded flip the first time, but echoes and re-echoes had bounded back. Then, the sun-filled weekends had ceased altogether. At times, behind the drawn curtains, as she poured over the work which she now brought home for weekends, she wondered if people watched her house. But she told herself that was silly. Still she would not let the milkman bring in the milk.

She blinked slowly and then her eyes became accustomed to the greenish light of the office. The beige walls of that room took on a stranger hue still, when a whisper floated from behind her.

"Being canned. All that work at home; all that money missing."

Far back in her mind she felt again the tightening in the throat, the refusals to the cry within her. The pounding reiterations of whispers, restless half-sleeping at nights. Weary half waking days, full of shifting eyes and whisperings from the other room.

Suddenly as if a fierce wrenching had snapped a taut shade, the scene came before her. The small bottle of capsules, now reduced to one innocent red eye, sat on the counter. Hot running water on her wrist and the gleam of cool steel hidden in the sleeve of her robe. Slow and dreamlike steps back to the bedroom, and blisful silence at last.

Footsteps then. It was the cool glass of lemonade which really woke her. And, he had come back now. Her suitcase had been packed by Angie. He had brought the paper for her to read as they drove to Camarillo.

"You're sure you *want* to go?" She had known he would ask again. "We could find a good psychiatrist here too, you know."

"Yes, I want to go. They say it is nice there, and perhaps no one will whisper, and after awhile I shall believe in myself again. Do you think so?"

April 1966

I learned to love you as a
child learns one and one is two
while reaching out to touch
the red balloons that magic to the sun

You filled my black slate with
freckled hands that fed me salt
with nuts and taught me to
uncork bottles of red wine

And your voice split my insides
with the crack of spinning
red marbles and I was child
again laughing at the
stale swirl of cigarettes
as you spun me in the air

But I was woman too and saw
the vacant eyes that laughter and
red mouth could not fill up, the wandering
years even both my arms could never hold
and now you're gone
and even now I learn

LINDA CAGGIANO

May 1966

For one split
I saw sand held between
The hour glass of the sun
As I watched a child
Mold salt-wet castles and
Cry as they dripped away
Into the flat-forever surface
And I heard the child tears
The water deep in my skull
And felt the yellow
Gritty heat inside my bone and
For one split
The castle and the flat-
Forever surface flowed
Motionless hour glass intwined between
The sun and sand and water

LINDA CAGGIANO

The Sound of a Ring

LINDA WILLIAMS

It had been ringing for several minutes before she realized just what the sound was. Waiting out in the car, the warm sun filled the air with dust and the smell of upholstered steel. Now it came again and her imagination watched the tiny particles jostle in the sunbeams as the sound jostled her.

She leaned toward the rear-view mirror away from the open window as if to avoid it. Looking into the mirror she thought to herself. You don't look forty-three today, Virginia. Even though you may feel like it. She twined the charcoal curl behind each ear and reshaped the other little fluffs of hair that had been perfectly styled and didn't need it. It was the haircut that made her look younger, she thought. And everyone liked it that way, "accenting the grey" was what they always said, the friends here in Point Loma. They weren't different from any of the others, really. And she had amazed them. Today she had been especially amazing. Wouldn't they smile if they could see her tan and shining in white sharkskin after the moving preparations she had had to make. The phone was still ringing and she was still thinking and watching her picture reflected in the mirror. How funny, everything had been done. Everything but that. Yes. She had done all the packing, had called ahead to be sure the house was ready for them. The military would be proud of her regimenting her life. How organized she was. Perhaps there was a promotion waiting for her in Washington. But no, she had forgotten to have the phone disconnected. She was laughing in the mirror rather softly. Then watching her face change expressions she noticed how her eyes wrinkled while she had been smiling. Now she wasn't smiling and she began to see herself with still-wrinkled eyes, eyes getting a little grayer each day, eyes that had gone silent. She wondered just when it was that her eyes stopped talking, stopped sparkling.

Then it stopped. The ringing stopped and she was glad. But when she rested back against the seat, her mind kept on thinking like a ring, five seconds on this, three seconds on something else.

Why did she forget to take care of that telephone! It was amusing and so obvious for people who move as frequently as she and Harold. Where was Harold? There were only the two of them, two of them to get ready and she was waiting. Only the two of them, it was still nice to think about that. They had said no matter what, they would always be together. It was just a sudden love promise made between them. And it had never been broken, had it. She supposed that was why she first consented to not having any children. Children weren't movable and they had to be. What a shallow excuse it seemed. She was sure of its shallowness. But it was so difficult to talk to him about it, to tell him. To tell him. Still, Harold only listened, and he had so many strategies, so many little word maneuvers that always convinced her. And she was convinced, now. It was so much more convenient. Besides, she was proud of him—proud to be a part of him. The military career was the right one, she thought determinedly. After all she shared it with him, and that was all she shared him with. The rest

was time together, no balistics, no statistics. She wasn't jealous of the job as so many wives on base. She wasn't jealous. Not of the guns. Not of the uniform.

Funny, how she hadn't even remembered Harold's fascination with guns, when they were first married. She muffled a small laugh as an old joke stirred her in the seat. She remembered the old bus driver from another town, some other time. She couldn't remember just where. But, he told her that he always took his family driving on his day off. How funny. Harold was like that with his hunting. The weapon day at work was soon the weapon day at home. He never tired of the amazing precision of his guns. The clean-cut operation of a man, his gun, and a good dog. He was always talking like that.

The dog, she remembered him just now, his dog, the brute beautiful setter, Jamie. She had named him. Harold had wanted her to, and she always regretted using up that name. It was given away now, it belonged to the dog. Her name for something that was only his, really, even though he tried to make it different. But it never worked. It couldn't make them three. It wasn't more or less movable than a child, it wasn't more or less convenient for either of them, the two of them. She sounded precise and unemotional, just like Harold. Where was Harold? They had to leave.

Impatient thoughts stirred her damp back away from the vinyl. She turned and looking past the driver's seat out the window, she saw them coming across the street. The man and animal, coming smoothly, methodically.

The same sound began again startling the three of them to stiff attention. Recognition of what it was calmed her and she sighed watching Harold as he looked through her in the car toward the house and the ringing. Then he stared back again to her face framed in the window, Virginia waiting out in the car. She noticed his eyes had too gone silent and his hands tightened on the trigger-leash as the dog tensed with the ringing. Jamie hated noises like that and she wondered if Harold hated it too. He would be impatient with her about the telephone, she knew that. Her eyes squinted as a flash of sun fired from Jamie's chain collar. Her thoughts narrowed like her eyes. How she hated now, the moving, hated the major's voice that had come over the phone with the next assignment, hated the phone that kept on ringing.

Walking

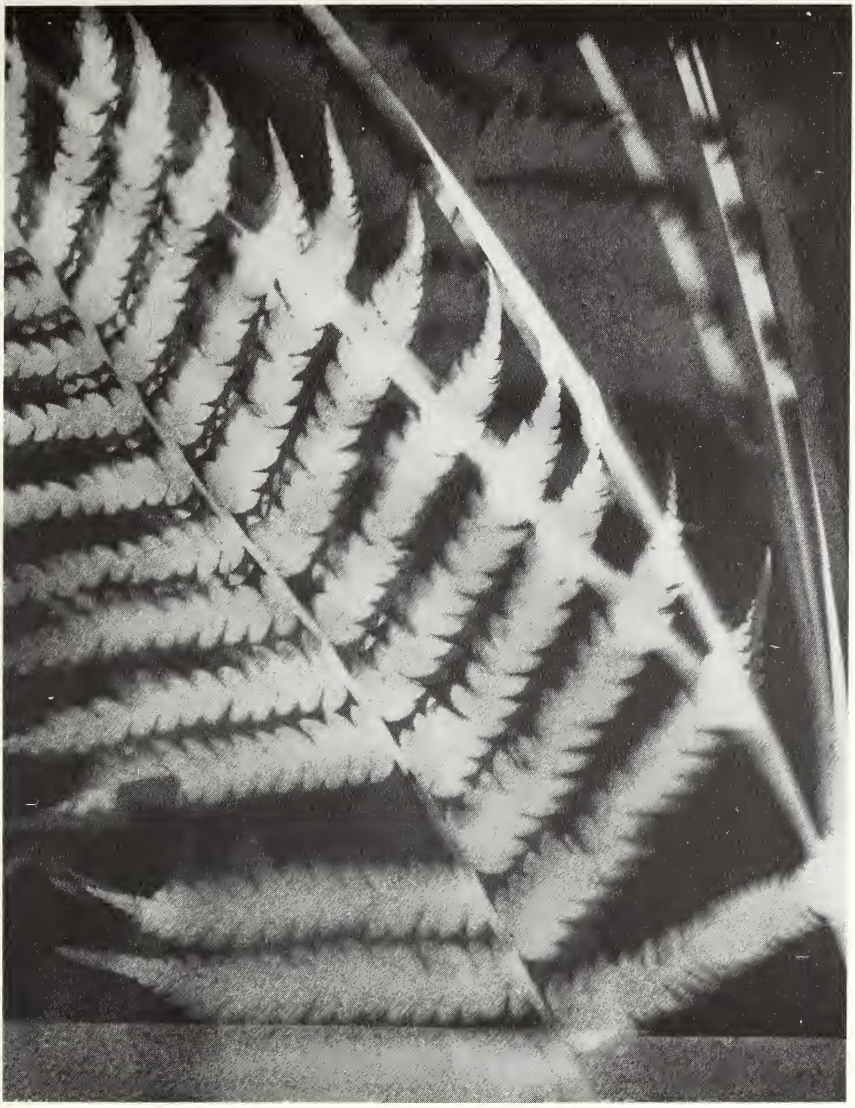
Shadow,
then a door
And warmth, silence, and loneliness.
Lacy, lazy trees
against a muted sky.
Green melts blue –
both
warm, silent, lonely.

I walk,
and I bring my shadow
into the warmth,
    silence, loneliness.
Gray touches green
and blue.
Gray passes;
green and blue –
warmth, silence and loneliness –
remain.

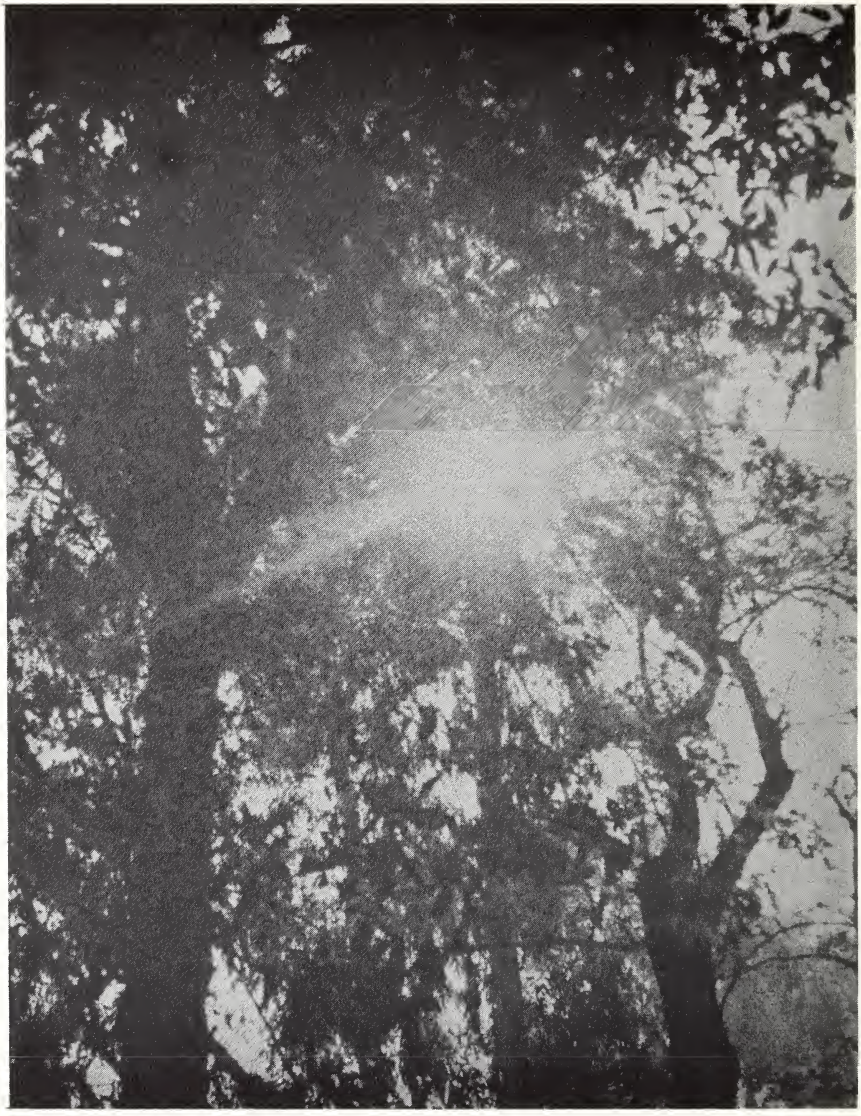
SISTER MONIKA MARY, C.S.J.

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'

"And the night fires going out, and the lack of shelter,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it."



"Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snowline, smelling of vegetation
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the
darkness,
And three trees on the low sky."



"---There was a birth certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt."

Discovery

Cold, calm
Coarse cave
PEACE!
a family.

Frail form
Faint face
PEACE
celestial!

Cease cries!
PEACE!

A Child,
the CHRIST
a FRIEND.

SISTER MARY BERNADETT, S.N.D.

Surrealism

One late Wednesday we wandered the museum.
While Jan was memorizing a stringy bronze
Matisse, I stood smiling away from them
at the brass-buttoned man who guarded the lawns,
Until a movement stirred the quiet of one
Picture, and drew my eye to see a girl
Within a window lit by an ocher sun –
Within a frame – yet who moved with a swirl
Of silk, not oil, and searched the room with eyes
That suddenly hooked in the quiet air with mine,
And asked me questions, ignoring my surprise.
I stood, like Jan, silent, and she turned sighing
Away from sight. So, I turned to Jan and cleared
My throat to speak of Miro, whose art is weird.

KATHY HAVERICK

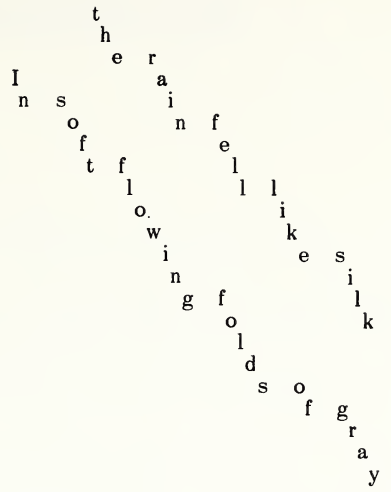
Dance

All swallowing wide comes the sea whose mouth is green,
Who dances her blue, and the sun is dancing.
The gold in the grass and my mind are burning,
Are burning, are leaping in jump-and-twirl, between
Fire and water, between the two who seem
To run upward and forward, a candle, a road. Falling
Burning and dust-throated, we are dancing
Our souls to the sea whose mouth is green.

In these days and these nights (who have blackened-white walls)
Is the fire. Touching warmness to height, touching flame
To the blackness, the world dances. It rises and falls
To the tune of the candle. Is this reach-and-jump all the same,
Same as the seek-and-spin? How do its calls
Make me dance – for they do – make me dance in the flame?

BARBARA BENEFIEL

Passing



MAUREEN PEVERADA

The Silver Crescent

The
Silver
Crescent
Dangles
Dazzling
In the
Tar-black
Star-flecked
Night

PHYLLIS FISCHER

Endsummer Night

KATHY HAVERICK

It started as a lark – something to do instead of playing bridge one Saturday night. Fretful and feminine, the August weather had driven us out of our stuffy apartment to the Simpson's house. But even in the country, the dog-days had thickened the air. The evening sat heavy on our laps like a full-breasted, round-rumped tart – too warm, too heavy, too perfumed – smelling of sweat, hair and jasmine, and of the red-baked, bursting tomatoes in Mark's garden. The starry blacks of July had been browned to syrup with tribes of droning insects and an over-ripe moon.

We settled in their den, a summer room of glass and wicker, with a bar at one end and a round card table at the other. Stiffly resisting the weather, my wife, Merriam sat in a wicker chair swirling the melting ice cubes in her drink. She hadn't wanted to come. So, she sat, her elbows and eyes sharpening with impatience as she clicked the ice against the glass, contradicting the crickets' rhythm, and by her silence, urging Joan Simpson to jabber. While our hostess was twittering about something "perfectly fascinating," Mark chatted amiably to me about his melons and tomatoes.

Leaning against the bar, I mentally rehearsed golfing jokes and watched the girls. The heat makes my wife freakish, changeable. Despite her witty displeasure with me in the car, she was now smiling contentedly at Joan's passionate conversation. She purred little answers, arched an eyebrow and reminded me of how feline she is. Still sleek, attractive, but always spun tight, ready to pounce.

Joan's shrill voice was rising shriller and Merriam had leaned toward her. (Merriam at least had the sense not to wear pink – in her forties.) I was nodding at Mark, when I caught the words in Joan's eager commentary: "She's an Indian– you know, a Hindu mystic–and she's supposed to be. . ." I turned to Mark. ". . .fabulous!" He was smiling at his wife, "She's got something cooked up for tonight." "So, I arranged for her to come here this evening." "Oh?" I boomed. But Joan was assuring Merriam: "Oh, I know you don't believe in that sort of thing, but we can do it just for fun."

I waited for Merriam's caustic answer, but she lanced me with her 'don't be boorish, Philip' glance and murmured something cooperative: "That will be interesting." A genuine Indian medium was due to appear at 8:30. I turned to Mark with a good story about a fake gypsy spiritualist, but he was still smiling at his wife. Yeah, what the hell, no need to razz her. "A seance, uh?" I said, "Better than bridge maybe," as I thought how easy-going Mark was about Joan's little fanaticisms. It'd probably cost him fifty or sixty dollars for tonight's entertainment.

Around 8:30 we cleared off the card table, carrying the watery remains of our drinks to the kitchen, wiping off the bar. Mark swung the French doors open in hope of some cool air. The door bell rang in the front hall. She looked Indian. She was a little brown walnut-faced woman–a cricket wrapped in a sari. When she swished in, behind our fluttering hostess, incense overlayed the thick

summer smells in the Simpson's den. Joan sputtered the introductions. The Hindu was called Madam something I didn't quite catch. It sounded like "Eyra."

We made a self-conscious commotion getting settled around the table, shutting off the lights, doing as Madam told us. I laughed to see Merriam and Mark cow under the little woman's accented commands, but I obeyed her too. We sat very solemn, like children, the medium, then Joan, me, Merriam and Mark around the circular table. She had us join hands. Then taking a sprig of mint or something out from her dress she made a ceremony of rolling the leaves in her palms. A sick-sweetness drifted through her fingers. In the sudden quiet, we could count the crickets or hear the hum of the power lines down the road. A breeze must have come up; I felt a coolness prickle my neck. Joan's hand trembled in mine.

The medium's eyes darted furtively from shadow to shadow around the room. "Hunting spirits," I thought, but the quiet dried any laughter in me. What did I expect – Ben Franklin? Cleopatra? My great grandfather's ghost? We stared at her and waited.

The crickets, the quiet, the thick scent cloaking the room were ripped apart by a hoarse whisper: "Merry, Merry!" Like children caught up in a horror story, we kept our quiet and turned quickly to the French doors. The voice called: "Merriam!" more loudly now. My wife looked startled. Following her gaze, I saw the caller. The Hindu, with her eyes sewn shut was blindly calling at the ceiling.

In a low, hoarse command: "Merriam, listen." Twitching her mouth in her gesture of anxiety or annoyance, Merriam answered, "Yes?" "I'm Richard," the low voice in the medium's mouth said. "Remember?" Hesitating, she frowned. "What do you want?" The room was very dark. The man-whisper surprised the quiet. "Don't you remember? It was during the war. You were nineteen and laughing and fond of chrysanthemums."

Merriam stayed still. Then words streamed from the blind medium like a poem she had to say quickly or she would forget. "We had only a little time – in November. And it rained. A whole world of water was out and a few umbrellas and just us. No one but you and me and the trees danced open under the falling sky. We breathed the cold cleaness, and the rough stench of wet wool, until the weather wore itself out and drops fell sounding like occasional kisses. And you stood against me in a Spanish portico listening to the rain gutters gurgling and gently devouring me with your warm, moist mouth. You remember."

A glowing poker that might be called jealousy or fear or even surprise had replaced my flexible backbone. I was crushing Merriam's hand in mine, but not looking at her. I didn't want to turn away from Madam Eyra. All of us were caught in a tension of listening. I could feel everyone's stare riveted, as mine was, on the Hindu's moving mouth. Then more suddenly than sound, it was quiet. And out of the stillness, in a whisper soft as a breath, Merriam said, "Yes. I remember." That was all.

I was searingly angry, but old tastes of things nudged at the corners of my temper. Twenty years ago everyone was young and fresh. I could conjure up rains that smacked of sky and trees and the bitterness of cities. But we got older; we bought umbrellas. So, I turned toward Merriam and she smiled at me her usual, subtle, half-disdainful smile. But it changed in the room's dark, and for one moment, she looked as soft as rain.

Then suddenly, the hoarse whispering began again, but higher this time, and the voice called: "Mother!" I hoped that the spell was broken; I thought

of turning to my wife to laugh accusingly. But the child-voice caught me up with the others and we sat watching the woman.

"Mother! Mother!" the voice pleaded. And Joan Simpson, in a kind of awe, whispered, "Mark it's Tommy!" And then in a low, choking tone she answered it: "Yes. I'm here." Her hand was motionless in mine, as if her every flutter was concentrated into the quietness of listening. I watched her sitting there in stiff readiness and wondered who the hell Tommy was, and wondered more at how hushed she was.

"Mother, where's Rusty? Can Rusty and me sleep in my treehouse when Daddy builds it? We could take graham crackers and oranges and be just like real explorers up on the South Pole. And we'd pull up the ladder and nobody could come up unless we let 'em and we wouldn't let any of those big boys come, 'specially not Billy Hobbs 'cause he wouldn't let me in his club and Rusty doesn't like him either. But we'd let you come up to the South Pole, Mother. So can we sleep out all night, Rusty and me, huh, Mom, can we please?"

Without a sound, Joan was sobbing. She was so still, it seemed the room must be trembling and we, not she, were shaking. Her face was a tight fist of pain, and finally, finally, there was a little choking noise in all the sliding tears.

A son, I thought. And I didn't know; I didn't remember. Fourteen, fifteen years ago – an accident, maybe? Before I could grope back to some hint before the voice could plead more, a crash split the quiet open. Mark was suddenly standing, his chair fallen heavily behind him. "Stop it! Damn you! Stop it!" He flung on the lights and startled Madame Eyra awake. For a breath we heard the crickets, smelled the ripened garden, then everyone got up, moved, broke the spell.

Merriam led the woman to the door; I searched out the cards and score pads. Mark stood, his arm around Joan. I righted the chair, fretted and straightened ash trays and glasses, trying somehow to get rid of that lingering scent of incense, and trying more to avoid seeing Mark and Joan standing there so strange and so open. Then he was smiling, fondly patting her shoulder and she was fussing about her shiney nose, so I got some ice from the kitchen and called to Mark for some drinks, and began telling the joke about the caddy and the rabbi.

It was only once around midnight and the second rubber when I noticed to light Merriam's cigarette and she smiled, that I remembered something had happened. Almost furtively, I glanced at Joan, who was giddily apologizing for having trumped her partner's king. I said something to her – oh about her hospital work – and felt Merriam's eyes smiling on me. A little surprised, she effused about a rumage sale and her committees, while I thought rather irrelevantly that I was glad we had driven out there that evening. And just then, Mark got up suddenly and closed the French doors against the now-cool night.

Day Dream

It was make believe for me

But when it became for you too –

It was real.

SALLY YOULE

reverie

lightly bright and prickly new
i feel
as i laugh, skip, play the jacks
of childhood

MARYBETH CROSLAND

Alone

i am alone.
(not lonely –
lonely being a want
of companionship)
just alone
with my
mindWanderings

CAROLE ALONZO

The Rains Came

The Rains came.
Slivers of cellophane blown by hand
touching the earth in semi-silence
absorbing the dryness of the grey blacktops.

The Rains came.
The great levelers of highest mountains
and bold track stars.
Everyone and everything is made
equal by the Rains.

The Rains came.
Torrents of tilting fingertips
touching the earth – a typewriter.
Each drop is but a letter, forming puddles
of words, streams of sentences,
oceans of paragraphs.

The Rains came.
descending in desolation
attempting to become friends with
mankind; their overeagerness only
drives men away. Away from
the great Rains – and into
the shelter of the nearest hell-box.

ROSE DE GIORGIO

Walls: the inside and outside

KATHIE ANDREW

In a sense it might be said that Theodore Dreiser placed Clyde Griffiths of *An American Tragedy*[1] in an experimental laboratory and merely wrote up his observations of him. Dreiser explores every force, internal and external, that lures Clyde to or distracts him from his eventual execution. He does this both directly, through an omniscient narrator, and indirectly through imagery and symbolism. Two of the motivating forces he utilizes are the lure of materialistic success in the city and the weak nature of Clyde himself. Dreiser makes use of walls to symbolize material success, and the cries of birds in the wilderness to emphasize Clyde's weak nature.

Dreiser begins the book by setting a scene:

> Dusk – of a summer night.
>
> And the tall walls of the commercial heart of an American city. . . such walls as in time may linger as a mere fable (p. 19).

The scene, and the method of presenting it, portray a feeling more than a fact. We are made to sense that there is a type of awe surrounding the city in its walls; walls that might become a "mere fable" in time. Then we are given a picture of a small boy and his naive, mission-preaching family threading their way through the "canyon-like way" (p. 19) of a side street. The boy, Clyde Griffiths, is twelve years old, and the words Dreiser uses – tall walls, heart, linger, fable, canyon-like – describe the city as Clyde sees it. The element of fascination that Dreiser has weaved into this beginning description is the wide-eyed fascination that Clyde feels for the city.

> The handsome automobiles that sped by, the loitering pedestrians moving off to what interests and comforts he could only surmise; the gay pairs of young people, laughing and jesting and "kids" staring, all troubled him with a sense of something different, better, more beautiful than his, or rather his family's life (p. 22).

The lure of the city is vague and undefined for Clyde at this point, as is the description of its walls. However, the lure of the city is strong enough to cause Clyde to leave home and seek it out, and description of the walls is clear the enough to mark it as something to watch for in the future.

Dreiser uses the wall symbol again at the beginning of another section of of the book. Clyde has left home, held various jobs, and done some traveling; now he is arriving at his rich uncle's hometown, where he hopes to settle down and make something of himself. The factory town has the same fascination for him that he felt in the city, but it has become more definite, more realistic. He has been wandering through the town, looking it over,

> And he had been thrilled in spite of himself. For somehow the high red walls of the building suggested energy and very material success, a type of success that was almost without flaw, as he saw it (p. 199).

The vague attraction of the city has become a definite desire to succeed materially which means to Clyde wealth, power, and an accepted position among the social

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[1]Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963). All quotations are taken from this edition.

elite. The fable-like walls of the city are now high and red, made of every day, down-to-earth brick, and their connection with the idea of material success is more obvious. The force of this success's attraction leads Clyde to struggle to obtain it, to try to live his life in the way prescribed by his uncle so as to achieve his goal.

Before the final use of the wall symbol in the book, there is an interlude in which the weakness of Clyde's character is particularly emphasized. Clyde desires to live as his uncle insists he must. This means, among other things, that he is not permitted to associate with any of the girls in the factory in which he works. However, Clyde begins seeing one of the girls, Roberta Alden, secretly. When she becomes pregnant and threatens to expose him unless he marry her, he panics. To marry her, a factory girl, would be to lose his job and all hope of "material success." He broods over the situation until he is in a frenzied state of mind. Then, while he is taking a trip in a lonely, deserted lake region he thinks of drowning her, and as the thought passes he hears the call of a weir-weir bird.

> And at one point it was that a weir-weir, one of the solitary water-birds of this region, uttered its ouphe and barghest cry, flying from somewhere near into some darker recess within the woods. And at this sound it was that Clyde had stirred nervously and then sat up in the car (p. 490).

The loneliness of the region, the wierdness of the cry, and the degree of nervousness it produced in him elicit a feeling of eeriness. Clyde says, "It makes me feel creepy" (p. 490). The fact that his feelings and fears master him and he succumbs to superstition and lapses of memory points out his inability to meet the situation into which he has been "driven." His nature is not strong enough to face his problem, and the imagery of the bird crying in the wilderness emphasizes the helplessness of the conflict within him.

Clyde hears the cry of the weir-weir bird again right before Roberta's death, and it has the same effect on him. Then, immediatley after she has drowned, he hears a screech owl in the woods:

> But, God, what was that?
> Oh, that terrible sound!
> Like a whimpering, screeching spirit in this dark! . . .
> He dropped his bag and in a cold sweat sunk down, crouching behind a tall, thick tree, rigid and motionless with fear (p. 563).

Clyde is in such a state when Roberta drowns that he is not sure whether he is guilty of murder or not, but he knows he made no attempt to rescue her. His whole spirit shrinks from the box he has worked himself into, the series of events and situations that have brought him to this point. He is again unable to face reality as it is, and at the screech of the bird he crumples to the ground to hide. He does not have enough strength of character to be able to live as the lure of the walls and material success demand. He has failed completely, and the cry of the screech owl "in this dark" increases the feeling of defeat and despair that comes with this failure. The use of the birds, then, has been to take us away from the city, to eliminate the outside influences of society from our minds so that we will be able to recognize and accept the intrinsic forces of nature at work in Clyde.

After this interlude in the wilderness of Clyde's nature, Dresier returns to the extrinsic force of the city and of walls. Clyde is convicted of Roberta's murder and sentenced to death. As he awaits his execution he makes his clearest observation of the impact of outside forces upon him:

> The guards were iron, too – mere machines, automatons, pushing and pushing and yet restraining and restraining one – within these

walls ... pushing, pushing, pushing – always toward that little door over there, from which there was no escape (p. 885).

If the walls symbolize a desire for material success, one is tempted to moralize at this step and say that this is where a great desire for material success will lead one. However, Dreiser does not seem to be making this, or any, moral judgment. The combination of forces in Clyde's life, of which a drive to succeed materially and an inherently weak and cowardly nature are two, seem to have led him inevitably to this end; but if he had been led inevitably by things over which he had no control, no moral judgment is possible. The symbolism of the walls and the imagery of the birds adds indirectly to the evidence Dreiser produces that Clyde is determined in his activities – that he is pushed and restrained until there is no longer any escape and he loses his identity, and his life, amid these forces.

Amen

Wind
whistle me away
higher than trees
farther than
a Place
to imagination's
burial ground
Wind
let me sleep
in the reality
of Wishing
never to wake
or
DIE.

CAROLE ALONZO

Wuthering Heights

Come:

Take my hand and let us run up to
The hill of sweet sensed heather
There, we can dream far beyond
The cotton misted moors;
There, you'll be majesty, and I
Your slave;
There, feathery stalks will bow low
With the wind

Come:

That will be our kingdom to rule.

PHYLLIS FISCHER

History Test in Ten Minutes

Eyes slip smoothly over sentences
but mind
busy chattering
wanders off the measured printed line
sheds meaning like clothes
before a swim
then plunges
into the stream of fantasy
what if's and maybe's float by
and mind slips out
upon a sun-baked rock
and basks in the warmth of a future dream
Eyes march over the printed words
turn page, start at top:
and mind
slaps
at mosquito worries
and dabbles toes in the running stream of hopes
then
lazily stretching
yawns
gets up
and strolls
through cool woods bird-brimming with song
flower-flowing with fragrance
then
Turn page, next paragraph:
mind laughs lightly
running
down
the path
to
End of book. Eyes stop, look up, book shut...
Oh
no
not again!
Open book, start at beginning, paragraph one, page one.
N.B.
Mind follow eyes
No swimming
No trespassing in Fantasy Acres.
Violators will be prosecuted.

JEANNE BURNHAM

Auto Frost on New Year's Eve

Whose space this is I do not know
I think I'll park my car here though;
If he comes out he'll make me go
And park mine in another row.

My little car is hard to steer
I think I'll go and have a beer
With pretzels and a lot of cheer
The wildest evening of the year.

The fenders shudder and they quake
I didn't quite release the brake.
My shock absorbers cannot take
Another session of rattle and shake.

The roads are lonely, dark and steep.
And cops are cruising on this street,
So I must beat a fast retreat,
So I must beat a fast retreat.

KAREN MESSINA

Auto Frost
on New Year's Eve

KAREN ARSENA